



4th High-Level Ministerial Round Table on the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

The International Treaty, Climate Change & Food Security

In the Context of the 69th Session of United Nations General Assembly & the Secretary General's Climate Change Summit

United Nations Headquarters

New York

24 September 2014

11.00 – 13.00 hours

Conference Room 6

Concept Note

Context

Climate change affects agriculture and food production in complex ways. It affects food production directly through changes in agro-economic conditions, and indirectly by affecting growth and distribution of incomes and thus demands for agricultural produce. The latest report of the International Panel on Climate Change highlights the potential negative impact of extreme temperatures, droughts and the instability of precipitation on food production and food security. There is universal recognition of the importance of crop diversity for food production. However, fewer crop species are feeding the world than 50 years ago and there is less diversity within the crops being utilized. The loss of crop diversity endangers agricultural productivity, food security and our ability to adapt to the pace of environmental change.

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture focuses on mitigating the negative impacts of climate change on food production through the progressive conservation and utilization of crop diversity, and the integration of crop diversity into food production strategies. Food production strategies based on ensuring sufficient plant genetic diversity could serve as valuable insurance against the uncertainties ahead. The diversity contained in our food crops has the potential to provide vital relief and help boost food security. Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture are, therefore, critical in combatting the negative impacts on climate change on our food security.

The 4th High-Level Ministerial Round Table will highlight several significant contributions and the potential of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, particularly vis-à-vis positively impacting food security in the face of climate change.

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (The Treaty)

Agriculture needs climate-smart food crops in order to adapt to global climate change (new crop varieties with tolerances to drought, salinity, or alien invasive species). A great opportunity for

increasing resilience in food crops lies in integrating the product development chain, i.e. the upstream and downstream stages of value addition to germplasm, leading to new climate-smart crop varieties. With its unique mechanisms and open initiatives that respond to the multiple challenges embedded within the innovation chain, the Treaty provides the major international framework to create climate-resilient crop varieties.

- ***On-farm conservation and management*** - the Benefit-sharing Fund has been designed as a global initiative to adapt the crucial genetic diversity that we need to adapt crop production to climate change impact through strategic action plans and immediate impact projects.
- ***Germplasm availability*** - the genepool of the Multilateral System is a key upstream input to plant breeding programmes targeting increased productivity. Besides being important repositories of germplasm, these collections also provide valuable sources of value-added information about the baseline resources.
- ***Information systems*** - the Global Information System facilitates the exchange of information on scientific, technical and environmental matters related to crop diversity, in particular by assessing and identifying new sources of genetic variation through advanced science that combines genomic sequencing information with phenotypic and environmental data.
- ***Pre-breeding*** - a group of technical stakeholders is establishing a public-private partnership for pre-breeding, to broaden the crop genetic base by identifying genes in distant and in exotic materials and moving them into material more readily accessible by breeders.
- ***Technology*** - an open Platform supports technology co-development and transfer with capacity- and institution- building, through the establishment of a one-stop shop for germplasm- and information-intensive technology packets to increase agricultural productivity.
- ***Plant innovations and the seed regulatory mechanisms*** - the Treaty promotes synergies for the mutually supportive implementation of the multiple normative frameworks that apply to the different stages of the value chain, including the protection of plant innovation through proprietary regimes and regulation of seed variety release.

The 4th High-Level Ministerial Round Table will raise awareness and share information and experiences on how these unique mechanisms and open initiatives contribute to increased agricultural productivity and the breeding of climate-resilient crops within the overall policy framework of the Treaty.

The Treaty's High-level Round Tables are hosted under the auspices of the High-level Task Force of the Benefit-sharing Fund of the Treaty, currently chaired by the Minister of Agriculture of Oman, with the aim to raise awareness and share information on the International Treaty. They also serve as cultivation activities to promote and facilitate partnerships for the Benefit-sharing Fund of the Treaty. Since the Third Session of the Treaty's Governing Body, over the period of half a decade, four high-level roundtables on the Treaty have been held.

History of the High-Level Round Tables

1st High-Level Round Table: focused on the 1st topic, "The Importance of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in Meeting the Climate Change Challenges, Enhancing Food Security and Addressing Agro-biodiversity Erosion" and was hosted by H.E. Giancarlo Galan, Minister for Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies of Italy, in Rome, Italy, on 7 December 2010.

2nd High-Level Round Table: focused on the topic, “The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources as a Pillar of the Food Security and Agro-biodiversity”, and adopted the “Rio Six-Point Action Plan for the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.” It took place during the Rio+20 Summit and was hosted by H.E. Lars Peder Brekk, Minister of Agriculture of Norway, and co-hosted by the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply of Brazil and the Minister for Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies of Italy, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on 21 June 2012.

3rd High-Level Round Table: focused on the topic, “The International Treaty and the Policy Contribution of this Legally Binding Agreement to Cope with the Global Challenge of Biodiversity, Climate Change and Food Security” and was hosted by H.E. Suswono, Minister of Agriculture of Indonesia, in the context of the International Conference on Plant Genetic Resources, Food Security and Climate Change in Bandung, Indonesia, on 2 July 2013.

4th High-Level Round Table: focuses on the topic, “The International Treaty, Climate Change and Food Security” and is hosted by H.E. Minister Fuad Al-Sajwani, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Wealth of the Sultanate of Oman and co-hosted by H.E. Tine Sundtoft, Minister of Climate and Environment of Norway, and H.E. Andrä Rupprechter, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management of Austria. The 4th Round Table is being held on 24 September 2014 at the United Nations in New York, on the margins of the 69th Session of United Nations General Assembly and the Secretary General’s Climate Change Summit.

The previous round-tables have affirmed that the Treaty directly contributes to ending hunger and ensures environmental sustainability through its:

- **Governance structure**, which member nations have created to secure the world’s food crops and govern the conservation, use and exchange of plant genetic resources;
- **Multilateral System of facilitated access**, which currently contains over 1.6 million accessions of key food crops and facilitates the exchange of 600 – 800 samples every day worldwide;
- **Benefit-Sharing Fund**, which has already funded more than 40 projects worth USD 9,5 million since 2009 under the “Leading the Field” Initiative, helping over 24,000 farmers and enabling crop production to withstand drought, raise yield, and rise above climate change threats (ready to additionally invest over USD 10 million in the 3rd round of projects);
- **Unique mechanisms and open initiatives**, including the global information system on plant genetic resources and its multiple initiatives, the platform for co-development and transfer of technology, and public-private partnerships for pre-breeding.

The 4th High-Level Round Table

The 4th High-Level Round Table will raise awareness and share information on how agricultural productivity and climate adaptation of food crops can be improved through the mutually supportive implementation and enhancement of the multiple normative frameworks and mechanisms of the Treaty that apply to the different stages of the value chain based on plant genetic resources. This includes the facilitated access to baseline resources and sharing of benefits of their utilization, the exchange of related scientific, technical and environmental data and information, pre-breeding and plant breeding, the co-development and transfer of technology, and the protection of plant innovation and regulation of seed variety release.

Speakers and invitees include Ministers of Agriculture, Environment, Development and Foreign Affairs, members of the Treaty's High-Level Task Force, Ambassadors, dignitaries, eminent scientists, the public and private sectors, and other high-level representatives of national Ministries and International Institutions. A summary of the themes of the 4th Roundtable, prepared by the host of the Roundtable may be welcomed by participants at the end of the Roundtable in form of a communiqué.

Main objectives of the 4th High-Level Round Table:

- To facilitate high-level discussion on how monetary and non-monetary benefits generated from the utilization of plant germplasm under the International Treaty can support agricultural innovation for breeding climate-smart seeds;
- To discuss how to address climate change impact on food crops through the Treaty systems and their further development;
- To showcase the value of the Treaty's Benefit-Sharing Fund and its projects for climate adaptation of food crops.